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The Paired Placements Project: A Summary Report of a Field Experiences Initiative

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ABSTRACT

This project investigates the effectiveness of paired placements in a first professional semester within a teacher preparation program. Student teachers were assigned either individually to a classroom or were assigned in pairs to a single classroom for a five-week practicum. The student teachers, their teacher associates, and their university consultants all served as participants in this study. Results indicated that student teachers in paired placements reported decreased opportunities for teaching and observation, but increased opportunity for collaboration. Teacher associates corroborated these results but also indicated some difficulty in providing fair assessment to their student teachers. Therefore, this project demonstrated some significant advantages and disadvantages in implementing paired placements, and makes recommendations regarding how to address difficulties while maximizing those advantages if such placements are to be considered.

In order to address the growing demands on school-based practicum resources, the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge sought to explore the effectiveness of paired placements during the first practicum semester of teacher education (i.e., Professional Semester I). Effectiveness was loosely defined as the ability to adhere to the general student teaching model including the opportunity to: observe and collaborate with a professional teacher (and others in a school community), receive and implement feedback, reflect on the teaching performance, improve teaching skills, grow in professional attributes, express confidence, prepare for Professional Semester II, and enjoy the Professional Semester I experience.

A search of the literature suggests that few studies have been conducted on the efficacy of paired placements of pre-service teachers (i.e., two students placed in the same classroom with a Teacher Associate(s)). Of those that have been published, the most common reason for studying this type of teacher education training is to better understand how collegial teaching communities may be built (e.g., Cohen & Nath, 2006; Hart & Adams, 1986; Lemlech & Hertzog-Foliart, 1992). While it is evident that collegiality is characteristic of all effective working environments, it is presumptive to assume that it does, or even can exist. Consequently, it is in the early stages of career development that the requisite skills and strategies must be taught and practiced. They include collaboration, mentorship, peer review, peer coaching, and professional conduct.

Several studies have reported successful outcomes using paired placements. For instance, there is a practical benefit in reducing the strain on university supervisory resources in the field (e.g., Cohen & Nath, 2006). Faculty retention, research responsibilities, and supervision budgets must be considered when structuring practicum placements. Placing more than one student in each classroom ensures that there is less travel, fewer scheduling conflicts, and reduced stress on faculty resources. But above

all, student teachers are placed in a context that is better able to hone such vital professional skills as collaboration, reflection, risk-taking, peer mentorship, and the provision of appropriate peer feedback (Anderson & Radencich, 2001; Cohen & Nath, 2006; Hart & Adams, 1986; Rauch & Whittaker, 1999; Yopp & Guillaume, 1999).

According to Lemlech and Hertzog-Foliart (1992), elementary student teachers paired for a two semester teaching experience were able to acquire these skills, which manifested in the following stages. Peer Interaction (Stage One) was characterized as a time for emotional comfort, assurance, and nurturing. Partnering (Stage Two) had the students engaged in mutual assistance, helping, supporting, and brainstorming. Competition (Stage Three) revealed more comparative behaviours regarding strengths and weakness, envy, and attention seeking from the supervising teachers and university consultants. Study of Teaching (Stage Four) was a growth period for maturity, responsibility, and mutual respect. Integration of Skills (Stage Five) revealed greater competence, insight, and comfort with teaching and its requisite skills. And finally, Collegiality (Stage Six) was a time of increased trust and commitment between the students, as they better understood their own strengths and assets and how they could be shared. Therefore, these stages revealed a growth in adaptive collegiality, as well as greater reflective practice and professional development.

Hart and Adams (1986) published similar findings when studying Paired Placements. Using a case study approach, the researchers closely followed two pairs of students in a junior high school setting. Their findings revealed that the participating student teachers perceived a greater level of openness versus isolation, collegiality, feedback and growth, and professional reflection. Furthermore, there was more opportunity for modeling of instructional techniques, curriculum approaches, and classroom management by both the teacher associate and the paired partner.

Unfortunately, not all reported experiences have been positive. Cohen and Nath (2006) noted that on occasion some pairs did not get along and disliked having to find additional time outside of class to prepare team-teaching lessons. Moreover, the teacher mentors occasionally felt that in supervising two students they had acquired an added stress and workload. However, these comments were overshadowed by the positive reports by teacher mentors of instructional excellence and the increased benefits for classroom students. The student teachers also overwhelmingly agreed that the opportunity to observe their partner was an advantageous learning experience, and that the moral support they were able to provide one another was significant. Similar findings were reported by Wynn and Kromery (1999) who noted that due to these types of issues, teacher education programs may have to “sell” the advantages of paired placements to teachers and students.

In keeping with reports of positive outcomes, the Faculty of Education, University of Lethbridge has historically placed students in cohorts during their practicum. Based on anecdotal evidence, as well as supporting research evidence (e.g., Duquette & Cook, 1999; Melnychuk, 2001; Weinstein, 1998), students feel better supported, less isolated, and more reflective when placed in the same school as other pre-service teachers. Given these perceptions, it stands to reason that the next logical step of creating paired placements would sustain these positive experiences, as well as potentially enhance them.

METHOD PARTICIPANTS

The individuals participating in this study included all of the students who completed practicum during Professional Semester I in fall 2005. While 223 students were admitted for this semester, 203 students responded to the survey that was completed on the final culmination day in December. Of these 203 students, a total of 89 surveys were collected

from students in paired placements, and 111 surveys were collected from students in single placements (note: the data from three students was discarded as they did not identify whether they were in a single or paired placement). Participants in this study also included 134 teacher associates (i.e., 43 with paired placements and 91 with single placements) to whom these students were assigned, and 24 faculty consultants (i.e., 14 supervising paired placements and 10 supervising only single placements).

Surveys

Researchers collaboratively developed the three different surveys (i.e., student teacher survey, teacher associate survey, and university consultant survey) over a series of meetings. The questions on the survey represented major topics or issues that had been identified by students participating in a pilot project the previous year. Similar themes were represented on each of the surveys.

Procedure

Professional Semester I is the first semester within the teacher education/preparation program at the University of Lethbridge. The semester includes the completion of eight weeks of campus instruction followed by five weeks of student teaching. While on campus the students complete courses in Educational Psychology, Curriculum and Instruction, Language in Education, Student Evaluation, Communication Technology and a general course called Teaching Seminar designed to tie together aspects of each of the other courses. During the practicum the students are expected to teach approximately one-third of the time, actively assist the classroom teacher for one-third of the time, and the remaining time is to be spent in preparation and planning. Students may be placed anywhere in southern Alberta and those in the most distant locations (i.e., greater than 100km from Lethbridge) will live away during the week. All students are placed either in single placements (i.e., one student teacher

assigned to one teacher associate) or in a paired placement (i.e., two student teachers assigned to one teacher associate) where a possible maximum of six or seven student teachers are placed in the same school, and only single or paired placements are assigned within any one school. Each group of six student teachers is supervised by an assigned faculty associate, although a single faculty associate may be assigned to more than one group of students.

In fall 2005, the student surveys regarding practicum were distributed during culminating activities on the last day of the semester. University consultants (i.e., supervisors) distributed surveys to teacher associates at the schools and returned them upon completion. Faculty consultant surveys were sent directly by campus mail and returned to the investigators together with the teacher associate surveys. This method resulted in relatively high return rates. The return rate for student teacher surveys was 91.0%, while the return rates for teacher associates and university consultants was 74.9% and 77.4%, respectively.

Results

Data was analyzed using both descriptive statistics and Pearson Chi-Square analyses. Several significant differences were determined between the responses of students in single placements as compared to students in paired placements. The following are both significant and relevant results from the three surveys according to themes:

Time Distribution and Observation Opportunities. Student teachers in Professional Semester I are assigned full time to their respective schools for five weeks. During this time they are expected to teach one-third of their time, actively assist for one-third time, and use the remaining third for planning and preparation activities. The active assisting time is typically used by student teachers as an opportunity to observe an experienced teacher at work, and is used by the teacher associate as an opportunity to model effective teaching practice. Because

teaching times were not modified for paired placements, the teacher associates gave up two-thirds of their allotted instructional time to their two student teachers.

On the surveys completed by the student teachers and the teacher associates there were three questions intended to determine adherence to this time distribution. Responses from the teacher associates and student teachers were consistent. With all participants (in both paired and single placement classrooms) it was possible to adhere to the assisting and planning/preparation expectations. However, finding the one-third teaching time was more difficult in the paired placements as compared to single placements ($X^2(3, N=200) = 9.20, p = .05$). This sometimes left teacher associates of paired placements feeling alienated from their own students ($X^2(3, N=134) = 10.73, p = .05$), and forced the student teachers to actively compete for teaching time. Some comments related to this theme were as follows:

Teacher Associate 50: With paired students it is difficult to provide them with enough teaching time ... It may have been a positive experience for the student teachers because they could discuss the class together, plan and help each other to develop discipline and teaching ideas.

Student Teacher 110: I felt that it was hard to find enough time to teach on my own. There were many times that I was frustrated because I really needed to have some time to get up in front of the class myself and it felt that we were always competing for time.

Of primary concern was that by scheduling teaching time for three individuals, there was significantly less opportunity for observation of the teacher associate by the paired placement student teachers ($X^2(3, N=200) = 33.26, p = .05$). This sentiment was confirmed by the teacher associates as they did not feel that they had adequate opportunity to model effective teaching for their student teachers ($X^2(3, N=200) = 24.86, p = .05$). Comments included

the following:

Teacher Associate 100: They did not observe enough “experienced” teaching ... As new teachers I feel the student teachers should have more opportunity to observe experienced teachers. In a paired placement, significantly less time is available to observe me. I began to feel as though I was “filling in” the times the student teachers were not teaching.

Student Teacher 61: Paired placement did not allow me to observe my TA enough, not even close, because our [teaching] time was divided by three ... Paired placements made it difficult to discuss with our TA about the observations, again because of the time component.

It is important to note that not all teachers found it difficult to schedule teaching time and instead found that the model worked quite well.

Teacher Associate 62: I found my student teachers had ample time to teach their own lessons. They also had a lot of time to assist when I was teaching and when their paired placement was teaching. Generally we would have 5 teaching periods a day, meaning they taught two classes each while I taught one ... this model worked very well for our situation.

In general, it appears that while teacher associates were able to find ways to make the time allocations work (i.e., results show the vast majority of students in both paired and single placements were able to achieve their minimum expected teaching time), in some situations time allocation was a source of frustration and discouragement, and in other situations it even resulted in a competitive environment. However, providing the teaching time for two student teachers in one classroom left little room for observing the teacher associate. The inability to observe experienced teachers by student teachers and to model effective teaching practice by teacher associates is a significant source of concern.

Collaboration and Working Relationships:

Teaching today obviously requires a great deal of collaboration between teachers, administrators, teacher aides, parents and parent councils, and other members of the community. It is through such collaboration that dynamic programs and strong schools are built. Learning how to collaborate with others is an important learning outcome of the Professional Semester I practicum.

Student teaching is itself a complex experience involving many different collaborative relationships, particularly those among the student teacher(s), the teacher associate(s), and the university consultant. The relationships among these individuals were of particular interest in this study. The following results were drawn from the student teacher surveys:

As would be expected, students in paired placements reported a significantly greater opportunity to collaborate with other student teachers ($X^2(3, N=200) = 31.79, p = .05$) and others in the school ($X^2(3, N=200) = 8.03, p = .05$) as compared to those student teachers in single placements. There is also anecdotal evidence, supported by the teacher associates, of the benefits of collaborations.

Student Teacher 179: As a confidence builder paired placements were the best for me! I absolutely loved the experience and strongly recommend it because you need to learn to work, communicate and plan as a team! We probably did not get as much one-on-one time with the teacher, but we did have the support of our classmate. I was very fortunate to have a strong classmate with me and we worked together really well! I highly recommend paired placements in PS I!

Teacher Associate 117: The paired placement was a great experience. They worked so well together and gave each other feedback. They helped each other with their lessons and became stronger because of each other. They gained more confidence because of each other too.

But, not all students and teacher associates

felt this collaboration was successful, and in some instances it was simply non-existent or even destructive

Student Teacher 116: Paired teaching is a really good technique in theory but I had a lot of trouble with my partner as our teaching styles did not work together at all. There was a point during the practicum that I was ready to quit because I would come home upset every night ... It is very lonely and discouraging when you do not know who you can talk to if you are having serious trouble as I did in the first few weeks of practicum.

Teacher Associate 26: Paired placements are fine, but I believe personalities and styles should be strongly considered first. My team was not on speaking terms for much of the practicum. They handled this professionally in front of students, but it made team teaching or observations of one another basically impossible. As well (likely as a result) it made it hard to mix up or shake up their teaching assignments.

This study also examined the development of working relationships between teacher associates and supervising university consultants. There were no significant differences between the paired and single placement groups on items related to this issue. The inclusion of paired placements neither boosted nor compromised their effectiveness. Instead, 78.6% of the teacher associates in paired placements seemed to be slightly more likely to strongly agree to the statement "I believe I was able to develop a positive working relationship with the university consultant." This tendency may be attributed to the fact that with paired placements university consultants visited specific classrooms, and thus teacher associates, twice as often while conducting lesson observations.

Providing and Receiving Feedback. One of the cornerstones of the teacher education program at the University of Lethbridge is that university consultants visit student teachers in their placements and provide a series of

observations with feedback. Each visit is to include three major components: pre-conference, observation, and post-conference with written feedback. Teacher associates are also asked to provide regular written feedback to student teachers.

When asked whether the student teacher believed he or she "...received the amount of feedback...needed to improve my teaching", 79.8% of the paired placement student teachers positively agreed, as compared to 88.2% of their single placement counterparts. Teacher associates also reported that it was easier to find adequate opportunity to provide feedback to single placement student teachers (95.6%) as compared to paired placement student teachers (83.7%). Interestingly, 100% of the paired placement university consultants believed they had adequate opportunity to provide feedback, while only 90% of the single placement consultants responded positively. Written student responses included the following:

Student Teacher 41: I think our TA was overwhelmed by having two students and as such provided minimal feedback ...

Student Teacher 60: I enjoyed my paired placement, however I feel I would have learned more if I was in a one-on-one placement ... Your TA doesn't have a lot of time, so in a paired placement you don't get a lot of time to talk to your TA.

Where teachers were given opportunity to write open-ended comments on their surveys, the single most negative comment pertained to opportunities to provide feedback to their student teachers. Ten teacher associates commented that providing feedback is very time consuming and it is difficult to find the time to do so. There may also have been some frustration and confusion with regard to providing feedback to two individuals as opposed to both student teachers together. Variables that contributed to these difficulties included the fact that most feedback sessions needed to occur outside of class time, and students were often unavailable

due to carpooling, work schedules, and sports team obligations.

Teacher Associate 50: With paired students it is difficult to provide them with enough teaching time. It is also trickier to find times to conference with both students.

Teacher Associate 67: I found it hard to meet with each one individually and establish the type of rapport I've had in the past ... I don't feel I was able to guide them as effectively.

Several teacher associates also noted that the paired placement student teachers shared feedback between each other.

Teacher Associate 73: It was an excellent opportunity to work in teams, and engage in daily, meaningful professional conversations.

Teacher Associate 117: The paired placement was a great experience. They worked so well together and gave each other feedback

Teacher Associate 126: The pairing I feel is a positive step because of the feedback they can give each other ...

In general, it seems it was difficult to find time for feedback in busy classroom schedules; however, the difficulty in scheduling feedback sessions was not unique to the paired placement classrooms. Many teacher associates in single placement classrooms made comments regarding the need to give feedback outside of school time.

Evaluating Performance. At the University of Lethbridge student teachers in PS I are provided with a mid-round (Formative) assessment and a final (Summative) assessment. Teacher associates participate by completing both forms. During the semester in which this study took place, the faculty was piloting a new set of evaluation forms. These forms were designed to more fully articulate teaching performance criterion and standards of performance than in previous assessments. In

this study, student teachers were asked if they felt they were assessed fairly, while teacher associates and university consultants were asked if they felt they could assess their student teachers fairly, without comparison to others. When asked whether they could assess the "... student teacher(s) fairly based on individual achievement without comparison to others", teacher associates in the paired placement groups were less optimistic ($X^2(3, N=134) = 17.16, p = .05$). They reported higher levels of concern regarding assessment and being able to assess without comparison to the other student teacher. Comments included the following:

Teacher Associate 54: ... a challenge to do evaluations for two and keep them separate, not compare.

Teacher Associate 62: I wonder how well it would have worked if one of the student teachers was not as competent as the other. It would have been difficult to evaluate them without comparing them to each other.

Teacher Associate 124: I see advantages and disadvantages to paired placement. I found it difficult not to compare the two student teachers ...

Similarly, student teachers in paired placements were less likely to feel that they had been fairly assessed without comparison as compared to their single placement counterparts (86.5% and 93.7%, respectively). Some of their comments included the following:

Student Teacher 86: The comparisons between student teachers through paired placement was unfair and lacked professionalism. This experience was/seemed very independent and I struggled to find who I am as a teacher because I felt that the conforming was the only 'right' way!

Student Teacher 181: ... I did think we were being compared to each other, and judged on each other's participation.

Reflection on Teaching. A major component of Professional Semester I is the student's ability to demonstrate his or her reflective capacity. In today's classrooms teachers need to be able to reflect on their own teaching performance and identify areas of strength and weakness. A professional teacher has the responsibility of identifying the effectiveness of their instruction as measured through student learning, and using the results of such reflection to improve their teaching talents. It is not clear what effect, if any, a paired placement would have on a student teacher's reflective opportunities or abilities. In this study, two questions were asked of the student teachers regarding reflection. One question addressed opportunity to reflect, while the other addressed the ability to reflect on teaching performance.

Within the survey data there were no significant results, indicating that paired placements neither promoted nor thwarted the development of reflection opportunities or abilities. In general, the student teachers made very few comments regarding reflection in their survey comments. Only three comments were noted, one of which was from a student in a paired placement who indicated that the ability to reflect was a key component in his or her success during the practicum. The other two comments indicated a certain resentment regarding the requirement to write reflective comments after each lesson. As stated by one student in a paired placement:

Student Teacher 176; [D]oing a reflection after every lesson was tedious and unnecessary.

It may be the case that the students saw reflection as a task rather than as a process integral to teacher growth. Therefore, there was no evidence, other than earlier observations that students have increased opportunities to collaborate and communicate, to conclude that reflective abilities are influenced either positively or negatively by paired placements. Confidence. Professional Semester I is the very first semester within the teacher preparation

program in which the students have a classroom placement where they take on actual teaching responsibilities. The students at this beginning stage often express concerns regarding their overall ability to engage the tasks of teaching, and whether they will be seen and accepted by their students as 'real' teachers. Therefore, the researchers wanted to know whether being in a paired placement had any effect on the confidence levels student teachers' feel and report during their practicum. When asked whether they felt confident while teaching in their practicum placement, 96.5% of students in a paired placement responded positively as compared to 95.5% of students in a single placement.

Student Teacher 179: As a confidence builder paired placements were the best for me!

Student Teacher 181: ... paired placement made it less intimidating ...

Workload. Although it would seem that having more than one student teacher in a classroom at a time has the potential to impact overall workload for student teachers, teacher associates and university consultants alike, that was not the case. When asked if their "workload as a teacher associate was manageable during this practicum" there were no significant differences between those with paired placements (93%) and those with single placements (98%). However, in their comments a few teacher associates with paired placements did express some concern regarding the workload. As stated by one teacher associate:

Teacher Associate 67: ... Unfortunately, I do not feel that I would like to continue as a teacher associate if you continue with paired placements ... Although things worked out in the end, it was a lot more work having 2 PS I students in my room and I don't feel I was able to guide them as effectively. I would love to continue to receive practicum students but one at a time please!

Two university consultants expressed some concern about the potential increase in workload for their teacher associates:

University Consultant 11: The TAs in the paired placements were magnificent ... They were willing to put in the extra time and they managed the practicum very well for the students. I get the sense that it was borderline exhausting for some of them. We must be careful not to burn these excellent TAs out.

University Consultant 15: I am concerned that the paired placements are too much work for the TAs.

The researchers were also curious to know if the shift in workload would result in other opportunities for teacher associates, including the opportunity to work with their own students on a more individualized basis, the opportunity to work in different ways with the whole class, and the opportunity to engage in collaborative work with other professionals. However, in each instance, there were no significant differences between teacher associates, with or without paired placements. Moreover, the university consultants reported no significant difference in workload between the paired and single placement groups, despite not having as many classrooms to visit.

Student teachers also did not report differences in workload between paired and non-paired placements. Ninety-seven percent of paired placement student teachers reported that they felt their responsibilities were manageable as compared to 95% of their single placement counterparts. It is reasonable to conclude that student teachers find Professional Semester I as a whole a significant growth experience, and this in itself overshadows individual differences with respect to placement type.

Enjoyment. Student teachers were asked two separate questions regarding their enjoyment of Professional Semester I, with nearly identical results. When asked whether they enjoyed their “PSI practicum experience”,

98% of the paired placement student teachers and 99% of the single placement students responded positively. Secondly, both 99% of the paired placement students and single placement students believed that the practicum was a “positive experience.”

Student Teacher 3: I really enjoyed this practicum. I learned more than I expected to learn. It was a lot of hard work but I’m glad I was able to get through it all right and I was able to meet so many people and develop relationships.

Student Teacher 7: I had a great time in PS I; I learned a lot and really developed more about myself as a teacher.

Student Teacher 70: Invaluable experience. Everything was great!

A similar question was asked of both the teacher associates and university consultants to determine their perceptions as to whether PS I was “a positive experience.” Ninety-seven percent of the paired placement teacher associates and 96% of the single placement teacher associates responded positively. Comments regarding paired placements included:

Teacher Associate 61: I found the paired placement to be a highly effective format. I have had extensive background with student teachers ... and found the paired placement to be an excellent model. It initiates collaboration. It provided support ... We were able to provide for modeling to also occur through visits to other classrooms. Perhaps this was even better! They got to see alternate teaching styles.

Teacher Associate 117: The paired placement was a great experience. They worked so well together and gave each other feedback. They helped each other with their lessons and became stronger because of each other. They gained more confidence because of each other too.

The most common concerns which seemed to compromise teacher associates' enjoyment of the practicum involved opportunities to model effective teaching, and opportunities to provide feedback without comparing one student teacher to the other.

Teacher Associate 20: Paired placement reduced amount of teacher-student teacher interaction. Less reliance on teacher as they worked on planning and preparing lessons together. Also, less opportunity for student teachers to observe master teacher. I also noticed less interaction with students as they did much planning and preparation together, as well as assisting each other with the lessons. A great team-teaching experience for them!

Teacher Associate 49: With a paired placement it is often difficult to do an excellent job of modeling each subject taught for the student teachers. Timetabling just didn't allow for that and the opportunity for them to teach the subject. Paired placements potentially show a false reality – since there generally isn't an extra body available to jump in and assist.

Teacher Associate 54: There was little to no chance to do any modeling when there are paired student teachers ... Also a challenge to do evaluations for 2 and keep them separate, not compare. Overall enjoyed the experience and the 3 of us worked well together.

Teacher Associate 131: The student teachers I had the opportunity to work with were both exceptional and the paired placement was a huge success. I did find it challenging to meet with them alone, however they were OK with all of us meeting together. I was also very conscious of not comparing them. If the student teachers were not both very strong and collegial this arrangement may not have worked.

Overall, comments regarding paired placements were generally positive and the teacher associates did seem to enjoy working with their student teachers. Variables that may compromise enjoyment in paired placements

include: ensuring that the individual students in the pair are compatible, and finding the time to attend to all aspects of the practicum (e.g., finding enough teaching time for everyone with the opportunity to model effective practice, finding the time to meet with student teachers individually, and finding time to provide individual feedback).

With respect to the university consultants, 100% of those supervising paired placement students responded positively when asked whether “the practicum was a positive experience” as compared to 90% of their single placement counterparts.

Teacher Skills and Attributes. The PSI practicum evaluation forms include many components that evaluate teaching skills, planning skills, evaluation skills, leadership and management skills, and growth in professional attributes. While each of these areas represent sub-skills, attitudes, and values, student teachers were asked to respond to survey questions regarding growth and improvement in each area. The researchers felt that it was necessary to cluster these items in order to keep the surveys to a reasonable length.

Among the five general categories, only one survey question generated a significant difference between the paired and single placement groups. When asked whether the student believed that his or her “evaluation skills improved during this practicum”, paired placement students were significantly more likely to disagree ($X^2(3, N=199) = 8.09, p = .05$). It would be impossible to explain why this result emerged, other than to suggest a relationship to the required PSI Evaluation course. During this course, the emphasis is on formative evaluation. As expressed by some teacher associates in paired placements, there may be decreased interaction between student teachers and their students, thereby compromising this method of evaluation. Assuming such differences do exist between paired and single placement groups, this would be a significant and important area for future

research.

Preparation for Professional Semester II. One of the most important outcomes of the Professional Semester I practicum is that students demonstrate preparedness for the responsibilities of Professional Semester II. As a result, each of the participant groups was asked to respond to a question regarding preparation for PS II. One hundred percent of the single placement student teachers, teacher associates, and university consultants believed that the “practicum served the intended purposes” of preparing the students for PSII. Comparatively, 100%, 98%, and 93%, of the student teachers, teacher associates, and university consultants, respectively, in paired placements had a similar belief. While the reported percentage for university consultants does not reach a significant difference, the comments suggest some apprehension.

University Consultant 11: They will feel very “alone” in PS II. That may be intimidating for some and empowering for others. They were well supported in this teaching round.

University Consultant 13: I’m not sure. It was a positive experience for the pair, who developed a close working relationship.

University consultant 20: Verdict may still be out ... still have some lingering concerns about enough individual teaching time.

University consultant 22: Not for pairs – they had less teaching time and having the partner in the room created some sense of false security.

The primary concerns expressed by the university consultants in their written comments were that students did not receive enough individual time teaching, did not have sufficient time to observe their teacher associates, and had become too dependent on their teaching partner.

CONCLUSION

While it is true that some survey item responses did reach levels of significance, in most cases students in paired placements and students in single placements had virtually identical perceptions of their PSI practicum. The same pattern emerged in regards to teacher associate and university consultant responses. Based on these results, it is clear that certain issues and concerns should be carefully considered and discussed with all participating parties prior to the implementation of further paired placements. For instance, university consultants need to think through the pairing of students carefully, and to meticulously assign pairs considering all relevant variables (i.e., compatibility, personality, work ethic, teaching styles, expectations). Further, both student teachers and teacher associates should be given the opportunity to self-select between single and paired placements. However, the most important precondition to paired placement implementation is to prepare the students appropriately. Workshops and sessions designed to develop and improve collaborative, reflective, and risk-taking skills and attributes in students and teacher associates is necessary (e.g., Cohen & Nath, 2006). Specific topics, as underscored by the survey results may include: scheduling equitable teacher opportunities; articulating the nature and expectations of team teaching; managing, avoiding, and dealing with conflict; scheduling feedback opportunities and methods; arranging opportunities for observation of professional teachers including individuals other than the assigned teacher associate; and discussing evaluation procedures, standards, and fair assessment of student teachers. It should be noted that discussion of each of the topics above would be equally valuable for students and their teacher associates in paired or single placements. The issues are not unique to paired placements, but they may be of particular interest in such placements.

Survey results were quite consistent with the literature in support of paired placements (e.g., Cohen & Nath, 2006; Hart & Adams, 1986; Lemlech & Hertzog-Foliat, 1992; Wynn

& Kromery, 1999). Based on the forced choice and open-ended questions, students in paired placements believed that they had greater opportunity to collaborate, both with other student teachers and others in the school. They also felt that they had sufficient opportunity to reflect on their teaching and to manage their workload. Similar to their single placement counterparts, they enjoyed the PSI practicum experience and felt that they had sufficiently acquired vital teacher skills and attributes. Moreover, both paired placement and single placement student teachers felt prepared for PSII. Finally, it is important to note that the paired placement students felt confident throughout their practicum; a necessary condition for risk-taking, collegiality, and professional growth. For the most part, these sentiments were echoed in the teacher associates and university consultants selected responses and open-ended perceptions.

With respect to less positive experiences and perceptions, the survey results were also consistent with the literature (e.g., Cohen and Nath, 2006; Wynn & Kromery, 1999). As reported by teacher associates, it was difficult to find time to observe paired placement students. Moreover, the student teachers also had fewer opportunities to observe their teacher associate model effective teaching practices and techniques. Finally, time constraints also impeded the provision of feedback. Perhaps the most challenging consequence of paired placements concerned performance evaluation. Teacher associates were forthright in admitting to difficulties concerning comparison. Therefore, while it is undeniably true that in this exploration with paired placements there were some individuals (student teachers, teacher associates and university consultants) who truly enjoyed the experience and believed that they and their students benefited from it. It is also undeniably true that there were some individuals who disliked the partnering and believed it compromised the experience and learning of those involved.

In conclusion, there are unquestionably

some new challenges that arise when paired placements are implemented. However, despite some raised concerns, paired placements were largely effective, and should be considered as a viable opportunity to increase the range of student teaching experiences and the development of vital professional skills. Given the increased demands on school-based practicum resources in our program, and in programs across North America, as well as the increased demands for greater teacher collaboration and the reduction of teacher stress and burnout, the inclusion of paired placement programs may be both desirable and necessary.

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